

O 121947Z MAR 04
FM AMEMBASSY MADRID
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1157
NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L MADRID 000865

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/WE
NSC FOR FRIED AND VOLKER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/12/2014

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SP](#)

SUBJECT: SPAIN: POSSIBLE IMPACT OF TERRORIST ATTACK ON
ELECTIONS MARCH 14

CLASSIFIED BY: ACTING DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION CAROL J. URBAN, REASONS 1
.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: BEFORE THE MARCH 11 TERRORIST ATTACKS IN MADRID, THE DRAMA OF THE MARCH 14 SPANISH NATIONAL ELECTIONS CAMPAIGN CENTERED ON WHETHER PRESIDENT AZNAR'S POPULAR PARTY AND ITS CANDIDATE MARIANO RAJOY, WOULD WIN ENOUGH SEATS IN PARLIAMENT TO GOVERN WITH AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY (REFTEL). OVER THE LAST WEEK OF THE CAMPAIGN, BEFORE IT WAS SUSPENDED YESTERDAY BECAUSE OF THE ATTACKS, SPANISH SOCIALIST (PSOE) CANDIDATE JOSE LUIS RODRIGUEZ ZAPATERO HAD BEGUN IN EARNEST TO EXPLOIT POPULAR OPPOSITION TO AZNAR'S IRAQ POLICY. THE BOMBINGS MARCH 11, HOWEVER, WILL NOW PUT THE RACE IN A NEW CONTEXT. MUCH WILL DEPEND ON INFORMATION THAT EVOLVES OVER THE WEEKEND. IF ON ELECTION DAY VOTERS BELIEVE THAT ETA CARRIED OUT THE ATTACKS, THE PP MAY GAIN VOTES AND POSSIBLY WIN AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY, AS THE PARTY THAT HAS BEEN TOUGHEST ON ETA. IF VOTERS WHO WERE ALREADY PRONE TO OPPOSE THE PP'S FOREIGN POLICY BELIEVE THAT THERE WAS AN AL-QAEDA LINK TO THE ATTACKS, WE MAY SEE A SURGE OF SUPPORT FOR THE SOCIALIST PARTY. THE ATTACKS MAY PROMPT A LARGE VOTER TURNOUT, WHICH COULD BOOST THE SOCIALIST VOTE COUNT. MEANWHILE, THE SPANISH COUNCIL OF MINISTERS HAS PROVISIONALLY APPROVED PRESIDENT AZNAR'S VICTIM COMPENSATION PLAN AND WILL SEND TO KING JUAN CARLOS HIS PROPOSAL TO GRANT SPANISH NATIONALITY TO IMMIGRANTS WHO DIED IN THE ATTACKS REGARDLESS OF THEIR IMMIGRATION STATUS, AS WELL AS THEIR CHILDREN AND PARENTS. SPANIARDS ARE GATHERING IN THE THOUSANDS IN THE RAIN IN MADRID THE EVENING OF MARCH 12 IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE VICTIMS OF THE MARCH 11 ATTACKS. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (C) THE GOS REMAINS CONVINCED ETA IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MARCH 11 ATTACKS ON COMMUTER TRAINS THAT KILLED 198 PEOPLE AT LATEST COUNT AND INJURED OVER 1400. BUT THE DISCOVERY OF A VAN WITH DETONATORS AND AN ARABIC TAPE WITH KORAN VERSES HAS MUDDIED THE WATERS AND HAS BEGUN TO CAST DOUBT IN THE MINDS OF SOME VOTERS THAT ETA WAS RESPONSIBLE.

¶4. (C) SOCIALIST CANDIDATE ZAPATERO SAID MARCH 12 THAT THE "POLITICAL RESPONSE" TO THE ATTACKS SHOULD BE DIFFERENT DEPENDING ON WHETHER ETA OR ISLAMIC EXTREMISTS PERPETRATED THE BOMBINGS. ZAPATERO'S REMARKS IMPLIED THE SPANISH ELECTORATE SHOULD VOTE AGAINST THE PP GOVERNMENT MARCH 14 IF IT IS DETERMINED ISLAMIC EXTREMISTS WERE RESPONSIBLE, TAPPING INTO A THEME WE HAVE ALREADY BEGUN TO HEAR HERE THAT THE AZNAR GOVERNMENT'S SUPPORT FOR THE IRAQ COALITION PUT SPAIN IN THE LINE OF ISLAMIC EXTREMIST FIRE.

¶5. (C) IN ADDITION, PSOE NATIONAL COORDINATOR JOSE BLANCO CLAIMED TO THE PRESS (WITH NO APPARENT EVIDENCE) MARCH 12 THAT THE AZNAR GOVERNMENT WAS HIDING INFORMATION ON THE ATTACKS IN AN EFFORT TO AVERT A NEGATIVE REACTION BY THE ELECTORATE BEFORE THE SUNDAY ELECTIONS.

¶6. (C) IF THE ELECTORATE BELIEVES THAT ETA AUTHORED THE ATTACKS MAY TIP THE SCALES IN FAVOR OF THE PP, AND PROVIDE THE ABSOLUTE MAJORITY IT HAS BEEN SEEKING. BUT IF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION EMERGES OVER THE WEEKEND SUGGESTING ISLAMIC EXTREMISTS WERE THE AUTHORS -- OR PREVIOUSLY UNDECIDED VOTERS BELIEVE THE ISLAMIC EXTREMIST CONNECTION -- PSOE MAY WIN LARGER-THAN-ANTICIPATED NUMBERS OF VOTES IN SOLIDARITY FOR ITS OPPOSITION TO AZNAR'S IRAQ POLICY.

17. (C) COMMENT: BY LAW, POLLING ON SPANISH NATIONAL ELECTIONS CLOSED ON MONDAY, MARCH 9, ALMOST A WEEK AHEAD OF THE ELECTIONS. BOTH RAJOY AND ZAPATERO MARCH 11 DECLARED A SUSPENSION OF THE LAST DAYS OF THEIR CAMPAIGNS, MAKING IT DIFFICULT TO GAUGE POPULAR SENTIMENTS AFTER THE ATTACK BASED ON ANY STATISTICAL DATA ON VOTER REACTIONS. IF THE SITUATION REMAINS AS IT IS AT PRESENT -- WITH THE GOS ASSERTING ETA WAS RESPONSIBLE, BUT SOME FACTS CREATING SOME CONCERN ABOUT AN ISLAMIC EXTREMIST CONNECTION, THE PP MAY STILL WIN BUT MIGHT NOT ACHIEVE THE ABSOLUTE MAJORITY. IF VOTERS COME TO BELIEVE IN AN ISLAMIC EXTREMIST CONNECTION (WHETHER CONFIRMED OR NOT), THE SOCIALISTS COULD DENY THE PP A GOVERNING MAJORITY. BY SEPTTEL, EMBASSY WILL REPORT ON POSSIBLE COALITION SCENARIOS.

ARGYROS